

Poison and Negativity in Arundhati Roy's

Mother Mary Comes to Me (2025)

The contempt Arundhati Roy has for life and everything Indian is incredibly deep. Here are the negative statements, self-criticism, stereotypes, cynicism, etc., from her autobiography. They are presented as objective intellectual humility. But look beneath the surface; all you will find is pure poison. Imagine a younger generation (our kids and students) growing up reading these pages. How would they think about their friends (boys or girls), their teachers, parents, the world around them? That all men are pigs ready to rape. That all Indians are racists. That all upper caste Hindus are oppressors. That India is thriving on the blood and flesh of its poor neighbours. I am ashamed to have spent time reading this trash. So the only way I can atone for my sins is by compiling a list of the darkest lines from the book.

The core problem is not just the book's relentless negativity, but how cleverly this negativity is masked. Pseudo self-criticism is presented as wisdom, and raw cynicism is disguised as objective insight and an urgent political counter-narrative. Remember that all this is framed as an autobiography, where the author hesitatingly and yet bravely presents her own vulnerabilities and shortcomings. This is an old, tried and tested, and extremely powerful rhetorical tool, which immediately demands the trust of its readers, and builds credibility. If Roy is so vulnerable and yet so brave in admitting her own flaws, wouldn't readers drop their guard, become less critical and surrender? Once such a powerful emotional connection is forged, her audience becomes much more receptive to the underlying arguments, sympathetic to her cause and joint warriors. It is at this exact moment of bonding and vulnerability that misinterpretations, ideological biases, and half-truths are passed off as profound, divine revelations, granted by God herself. Her version of certain Mother Mary comes to her, and to you through her.

Pages and pages of this pure poison get pushed down the reader's throat, deceptively wrapped in beautiful language, perfectly designed to be consumed casually over a morning coffee or a cigarette. Take a look at the excerpts below to see what you are up against, though I sincerely hope you never have to read the actual book.

[Note: Letters in **bold** are chapter titles from the book.]

(i) Negative and cynical statements made about all men, women, Indians, Hindus etc.

Gangster

- "In that conservative, stifling little South Indian town, where, in those days, women were only allowed the option of cloying virtue – or its affectation..."

Fugitives

- "...while being simultaneously disturbed by their kindly, well-meaning racism towards Indians and India."

The Sliding-Folding School

- "...the land of son-worshippers. The land in which sons must be given more than daughters, more of everything – attention, love, money, education, inheritance, even food."
- "The land of infanticide and female foeticide, in which millions of daughters are done away with even before they are born, and some just after."
- "The corollary to son-worship is of course mother-worship. Ours is a land of mother-worshippers, too. Or, more accurately, a land that deifies mothers who produce and then deify their sons."

The Naxalites

- "...nothing threatened – and continues to threaten – the Indian elite (Hindus, Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, and many Communists, too)"
- "Like most people in the world, then as well as now, we grew up between shouting and silence. Some of us made up our own minds, others had their minds made up for them."

'You're a Millstone Around My Neck'

- "The Tamil films... were about kings and slaves, and Hindu gods and goddesses who cavorted with their consorts in the clouds with oversize musical instruments. Neither genre offered me any kind of solace or escape. For women, mortal or divine, they only valorized absolute submission to the python- coils of tradition and convention."
- "As a young girl growing up on a diet of these films, I used to believe that all women were raped, it was just a matter of when and where."

In Which Jesus Marries a Japanese Parcel

- "...those who had fallen out of the pan of the great Indian arranged-marriage transactions..."

Cake Walkin' Baby

- "For no fault of his, as he slept, she domesticated him, took the rock 'n' roll out of him, turned him into a normal Indian man with a normal Indian mother who was obsessed with her son."

In the Shade of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya

- "Millions of working men in the city cycled long distances. For a woman, though, it was different. It involved being chased down, hooted at, ogled."
- "My only other option was to submit to being molested twice a day in a crowded city bus... I didn't have the bandwidth to accommodate Delhi's male commuters who thought of women passengers as snacks they could help themselves to whenever they felt like it."
- "Even then, before the epoch of the Saffron Flag and the Hindu Nation, before Muslims were demonized, ghettoized and turned into second- class citizens..."

'Have You Ever Considered Becoming a Writer?'

- "I observed and experienced the fine art of Italian courtship. I developed a thesis about why (notwithstanding Urdu poetry and movie songs) most Indian men are so bad at it – their parents deliver them a woman of the right caste and class on a platter, with a dowry thrown in. They don't need to do a thing except snatch and grab."

Mama Bear, Papa Bear

- "Indian mothers and their obsession with their sons. They'll blindside you. Come at you from every angle. Even if they criticize their sons, quarrel with them, they cannot see beyond them."

The Exquisite Art of Failure

- "People who thought of themselves as successful and prosperous suddenly seemed like such an embarrassment, the way they strutted around and stole the light."

Blasphemy

- "The occult, bloodthirsty spirit uncorked by Advani and his Rath Yatra could not be returned to its bottle. It would go on to change India beyond recognition."
- "... the church-burning, missionary-murdering and Jesus-statue-smashing ... vigilantes on the Hindu far right ... were allowed to operate with complete impunity..."

The Band Breaks Up

- "...no matter how long and hard we fought, in India no woman of any religion, class, caste or creed would ever feel safe enough to sing to the stars on a lonely highway while her buffalo took her home."

'You Are Not Showing India in a Proper Light'

- "Unlike in the case of the rash of Raj films and series that had been made over the last few years... where the directors, producers and senior crew members were white, and the more junior people were Indian, in Electric Moon it was the other way around. We were the bosses. That didn't go down well."
- "How was I to explain to querulous British and American crew members that my trucks were held up and the shooting schedule delayed due to the onset of fascism?"

The Great Indian Rape-Trick

- "But I was equally disgusted by the pretend compassion of another class of people."
- "Few in those days were willing to concede that the point of the whole debate – legal, ethical, moral – was consent. Her consent. It was not about free speech."
- "But it would be dishonest to pretend that it did not enhance the threat to her life in a society that has a long memory for retribution and caste honour."

Things Fall Apart

- "In a country of desperately poor people, I of all people found myself snared in the trap of traps. The cage was made of privilege, money and property."

Mobile Republic

- "It became painfully clear that nuclear weapons were lethal even if they weren't used. The idea that India had proudly, openly declared itself a nuclear power seemed to have altered our collective imagination, turned it radioactive."
- "The prime minister... and many of his cabinet ministers were members of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a far- right, Hindu- nationalist cultural organization... who believed that India should be declared a Hindu nation and Hindus should be its first citizens."
- "...he gave me a lecture on ... why we needed nuclear weapons."

Rally for the Valley

- "Here was our great society ('This is India, my dear') in which it was perfectly right that men should inherit everything, and also perfectly right that women should be blamed for what wasn't even theirs."

- "There are few things in my part of the world that people (which includes women in my part of the world) love more than a self-effacing, invisible woman."

Jailbird

- "...mobs of men who belonged to vigilante Hindu organizations, proudly wearing saffron headbands to announce their ideological affiliation to the BJP and the RSS, were rampaging through the streets, slaughtering thousands of Muslims in broad daylight."
- "What was happening in Gujarat was straight out of Hindu nationalism's ideological play-book."
- "International Islamophobia arrived like a gift from God to Hindu nationalists in India."
- "...[the collective conscience of [the] society will only be satisfied if capital punishment is awarded to the offender.' A man's life was prescribed as medication to soothe a maddened nation."

A Home of My Own

- "It turned out that she meant I was brave because my front door opens directly into the kitchen and dining space – there was no place for hidden-away, out-of-sight servants... I couldn't believe it. The utter shamelessness of the upper classes in 'India, my dear'."

Madam Houdini and the Nothing Man

- "His marriage to an 'outsider', his divorce and early years of Humbert Humbert-ism didn't matter, of course. Because he was a man and this was India, my dear."

• _____

(ii) Pseudo self-criticisms presented as humble truths

Gangster

- "I have thought of my own life as a footnote to the things that really matter." "Never tragic, often hilarious." "Or perhaps this is the lie I tell myself."
- "Pathetically, I asked an autorickshaw driver if he could take me to the home of my mother's older sister, Mrs Joseph."

- "As a child I loved her irrationally, helplessly, fearfully, completely, as children do." "As an adult I tried to love her coolly, rationally, and from a safe distance." "I often failed." "Sometimes miserably."

'I Love You Double'

- "I felt myself shrinking from my own skin and draining away, swirling like water down a sink until I was gone."
- "I knew I had said something terrible, but I wasn't sure what."
- "Careless words from a careless child."
- "I learned early that the safest place can be the most dangerous." "And that even when it isn't, I make it so."
- "I didn't know what had upset me so much." "It's only now, as I write this, that I think I understand." "They had done nothing terrible – it was me."

Federico Fellini and the Kottayam Santa

- "I never told my mother about the wild boar, or the hunt." "I am not sure why." "I was unsure, I suppose." "What if I was wrong?" "What if it was just wild-boar affection?" "How ungrateful could I be?"
- "And at that moment, I was relieved not to have a father at all." "That's a terrible thing to say, I know, but back then fathers seemed like an extremely risky proposition to me."

Collateral

- "In the morning, she hugged me and said, 'You have a brilliant report.'" "I was filled with shame." "I hated myself."
- "Since then, for me, all personal achievement comes with a sense of foreboding."

I'm All for the Unconquered Moon

- "I envy him his moments of unmitigated delight." "I'm not sure that I am capable of those any more."
- "I came undone." "If I could understand myself better, I'd probably understand a lot more about the world..."
- "Anyway, all this to say that while Mrs Roy lay in her glass-topped coffin, I was in ruins..."

Laurie Baker and the Bald Hill

- "But truthfully, the fuel in my engine that propelled me all the way from Kottayam to Delhi was made of baser, less noble things." "The usual, actually – money and sex."

Joe, Jimi, Janis and Jesus

- "I, the awkward teenager, was stubbornly uncharmed and withdrawn."
- "I died." "I wasn't sure how Mrs Roy would react." "She surprised me by greeting him warmly, as though he was just another young person." "And as though he was wearing clothes." "I disappeared." "I melted into the back seat of the van." "I became the back seat of the van."
- "I had learned a new language and couldn't use old words any more." "'Answer me!'" "I couldn't think of a single thing to say, intelligent or not."
- "Picture me, valiant organ-child, freshly sexually awakened, completely dazed, dressed like a frothy fairy, perched pathetically on a milestone on the side of the Kottayam–Trivandrum highway."
- "Being annoying on long drives is obviously a talent I was born with."

'How's That Crazy Mother of Yours?'

- "I made it somewhere close to the top of the list." "I squeaked in somewhere close to the bottom."
- "I spoke no Odia, so at first we communicated in sketches." "His extraordinary, mine mediocre."
- "I played the fool in class, made no effort and understood nothing."
- "I was just collateral for a more important enterprise." "I was my problem, not hers."
- "I wrote to Mrs Roy and told her that far from thinking I was a fool, JC was my boyfriend." "Terrible mistake." "I can't believe I was so stupid."

In Which Jesus Marries a Japanese Parcel

- "To finish my thesis in time, I started taking Dexedrine." "Speed." "It helped me stay awake and work."
- "I inadvertently sang it out loud." "Fortunately, my professors understood that something was wrong."
- "In truth I was far older than others my age." "I had become a strange person, of a somewhat vagrant disposition."
- "I was a small person with spikes." "And a degree in architecture."

Cake Walkin' Baby

- "In my rush to judgement, I didn't stop to wonder whether I was guilty of doing the same thing."
- "I got drenched in the warm rain and cursed myself for what I was about to do." "It was inexcusable and probably suicidal." "Mentally unbalanced." "Yes." "I was about to leave a man I loved, a man who loved me, cared for me, supported me." "For what?" "Why?" "What would I do?" "What was wrong with me?"
- "I cursed myself for being immature and foolhardy."

In the Shade of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya

- "The indignity made me oscillate between self-pity and violent fantasies of vengeance."

'What's So Funny?'

- "I laughed." "I told him I didn't know the first thing about acting and that my Hindi was rotten."
- "Perhaps it was just my young, crude, somewhat oppositional mind at work." "Who was I anyway?" "Some sort of orphan upstart with a degree in architecture from a local college."
- "I was awkward and not sure what to do."
- "I have no idea why I felt free to behave badly with Sanjay." "It was just the wreckage of Mrs Roy's parenting speaking." "I ought to have been made to apologize and wash my mouth out with soap or something."
- "He was the first person in my life with whom I had been openly and deliberately insufferable."

They're Gonna Put Me in the Movies

- "In his company I was flattened by what I thought of as my ordinariness."
- "I acted as though I were in relationships with at least ten other men, and he was just another notch in my gun." "Lies, of course." "A 22-year-old's pathetic defence mechanism."
- "I acted surprised." "'Why?' "What's wrong with me?'" "I was being nasty." "I wanted her to say whatever was on her mind out loud."
- "I filed it away in my Bad Girl file along with the women's-college headmistress's predictions about my questionable moral character and the Goa psychiatrist's observations about my failings."

'Have You Ever Considered Becoming a Writer?'

- "I wandered the streets all day, an unenlightened fool, impervious to the charms and splendour of Italy." "Considering I was a student of architecture, this was almost criminal behaviour."
- "All through school I did consistently badly in English language and literature." "I never understood the rules." "She was right – they were complete and utter rubbish."
- "Once I started running, once I joined Architecture School, I thought that a writer was the last thing I could ever be." "I gave up."

Mama Bear, Papa Bear

- "I had no idea what I was doing with my life." "I felt that if I told her anything about my situation, she would crush me with her contempt."
- "I knew I still wasn't really writing, only practising." "Learning."
- "But I was keenly aware that my experience of motherhood (Mrs Royhood) did not make me ideal mother material."

The Exquisite Art of Failure

- "When I first saw it, the fact that she had finally made herself a home that was so complete, so her, and that it had no place for me, hit me with something like a physical force." "My mother's home didn't include me at all." "I was wrecked." "Perhaps I had no right to be."

In Which Annie Gives It Those Ones

- "Electric Moon is a somewhat cruel satire." "I wrote it with my head, not my heart." "I did not love it as I loved Annie." "There was nothing loveable about it." "Not a single truly likeable character." "Nobody soliciting the affections of the audience." "A mistake, perhaps."

The Band Breaks Up

- "Our parenting was flawed and less responsible than it ought to have been."
- "The explanation for this could be a crude one." "My writer's fee from Channel 4 was paid to me in pounds." "It translated into a lot of money in rupees." "I had bought myself time."
- "I had sabotaged our film career."

The God of Small Things

- "The more I wrote, the more it puzzled me."

- "I was puzzled, because I realized that I wasn't writing it from beginning to end." "I felt as though I were sculpting smoke."

Things Fall Apart

- "I had suddenly, for no reason, grown suspicious of him." "Who was he?" "Why was he so keen?" "I decided that if he turned out to be some old colonial 'India hand' and patronized me about his love of everything Indian, I would politely thank him and turn him down." "Based on absolutely nothing, I began to build up an active hostility towards him."
- "Apart from being happily shocked and having no secretly prepared 'in case I win' speech to give, I was a little graceless up there..." "It was unnecessarily fractious." "I shouldn't have done that." "I regret my behaviour." "It was caused by apprehension, by that familiar fear of being trapped."
- "Even to explain my dilemma to them was a form of judgement." "I made myself miserable with my upside-down, inside-out mind." "I made everyone else miserable, too."
- "For me to live there under the changed circumstances seemed to me a form of high fakery..." "Added to that snarl of tangled feelings was the fact that by now I was the rich parent." "The rich parent without any authority or parental rights." "An intractable, impossible position."
- "That made me principled and hypocritical all at once."
- "In a country of desperately poor people, I of all people found myself snared in the trap of traps." "The cage was made of privilege, money and property."

Mobile Republic

- "It couldn't be that my storm-warning alarms about the approaching tsunami of Hindu nationalism went off early only because I am not Hindu or a patriot or a flag-waver." "More likely it was my squirrel training from my ledge-life in Ayemenem, combined with the slightly warped sense of culpability that comes with sudden fame."
- "In the process, like a suicide bomber, I had blown myself to smithereens, too."

Rally for the Valley

- "It just came out that way." "I hadn't thought it through."
- "As I travelled in the Narmada Valley... I felt a little guilty and embarrassed that my book was selling in millions around the world and my bank account was burgeoning." "What did it mean?" "What was the meaning of being me?"

- "I learned the hard way that too much feminine self-effacement can lead people to slump against you with a callous sense of entitlement and serious disrespect." "At times I felt like the most visible invisible woman in the world."
- "I muddled around in this ethical quagmire for a long time before I found my way through it."
- "In case I'm giving the wrong impression here – I wasn't being self-sacrificing and generous." "I believe in the axiom 'Beware of the person that sacrifices'."

Madam Houdini and the Nothing Man

- "I remember thinking, What chance do I have at anything that vaguely resembles normality?"
- "I often miscalculated." "In truth I am constructed from its debris."

Walking with the Comrades

- "To protect them I did what I never thought I ever would." "I fled." "I have never felt worse about myself."

'Her Birth Certificate Was an Apology from God'

- "I am the outcome of their failure to deliver on their promise as abortion-inducers."
